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## **Healey-Driscoll Administration Launches ‘Your Presence Is Powerful’ Campaign to Raise Awareness of Importance of School Attendance**

*Students, educators, families encouraged to submit a creative piece of artwork, music, photography, videography, or writing by December 20*

**BOSTON** – The Healey-Driscoll Administration launched the ‘Your Presence is Powerful’ campaign today as part of [their continued efforts](#) to reduce chronic absenteeism and support students getting back into the classroom where they have access to a variety of supports, including universal free school meals and mental health services.

Emphasizing the importance of attending school, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) is asking students, school staff, educators and families in Massachusetts public pre-K-12 schools and adult learning classes to submit a creative piece of artwork, music, photography, videography or writing to express why they attend school. [Submissions are due by December 20, 2024.](#)

“Our administration has been working hard to ensure all students have access to a high-quality education in which they receive the support and services they need and always feel welcome. But it’s so important that students are attending school so that they can have these experiences and learn and grow with their peers,” said **Governor Maura Healey**. “It’s great to see the attendance numbers moving in the right direction. We’re proud of the progress our state made last year, and this new campaign will help remind people how important it is to attend school.”

“September is always a new beginning in schools, and we want to start this school year strong, building on the improvements we made last year,” said **Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll**. “I look forward to seeing all of the creative projects our students and

educators submit, showing why they love going to school and why it is so important.”

Chronic absenteeism continues to affect schools throughout the country. Before the pandemic, 13 percent of Massachusetts students were chronically absent, meaning they had missed 10 percent or more of the school year, or at least 18 days. Chronic absenteeism rates are still above pre-pandemic levels, but the state [is making progress](#), with the statewide rate decreasing 5 percentage points from 24.5 percent in March 2023 to 19.6 percent in March 2024. That is also a nearly 10 percentage point decrease from March 2022.

“Absenteeism is really a manifestation of an unmet need. Schools offer counseling, extracurricular activities, meals, and the chance to learn with and from students’ peers. If students aren’t there, they can’t benefit from these opportunities and are missing out on so much more than their education,” said **Education Secretary Patrick Tutwiler**. “While there is still much more progress to make, thanks to the hard work of families, educators and entire school communities, we are moving in the right direction. It’s clear our efforts are working.”

“Chronic absenteeism can significantly hinder a student's learning, their ability to build relationships, and access the additional support they need,” said **Acting Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education Russell D. Johnston**. “I’m encouraged to see attendance rates improving, and I’m optimistic that districts and families will keep collaborating with us to make schools vibrant, engaging destinations for all students.”

The Department has resources and supports available for schools and districts related to [chronic absenteeism](#), including [family engagement resources](#), guidance on [attendance policies and best practices for schools](#) (*download*), and information on initiatives designed to promote welcoming and supportive school environments for all students.

The Your Presence Is Powerful campaign builds on the significant investment and historic policies the Healey-Driscoll Administration has delivered for students and schools, including:

- Fully funding the Student Opportunity Act the last two years, delivering the largest investment in K-12 schools in our state’s history to reduce opportunity and achievement gaps.
- Making universal access to free lunch and breakfast every day in school permanent for public school students – one of only eight states in the country to continue this when the federal funding ended.
- Launching Governor Healey’s [Literacy Launch Initiative](#), a nation-leading strategy to expand access to evidence-based reading instruction for Massachusetts students.
- Dedicating a portion of federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funds to award districts and educational collaboratives

\$10,000 each last year to address chronic absenteeism, including to strengthen or scale family engagement initiatives or student monitoring programs, or to provide attendance recovery academies.

- Investing an unprecedented \$13 million in the [Bridge for Resilient Youth in Transition \(BRYT\) program](#), an in-school program supporting students who have fallen behind academically due to challenges with their mental health. This investment funds the creation of BRYT programs at more than 30 high-need schools across Massachusetts. This is the first time the state has provided funding to establish BRYT in schools; the program has historically only been available to districts with the economic resources to get it off the ground.
- Investing \$5 million through the Fiscal Year 2025 budget to develop a new statewide mental and behavioral health framework for birth through higher education.

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